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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001761

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: CODEL ACKERMAN GIVES HARIRI STRONG  
MESSAGE OF SUPPORT TO HARIRI

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Codel Ackerman delivered a strong message of U.S. bipartisan support for Lebanon during its meeting with majority leader Saad Hariri. Rep. Ackerman said that with the administration change in Washington, there would be no change in U.S. support for Lebanon. In particular, the USG will continue to support the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and work to enhance the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Hariri welcomed the Codel's statements and recommended the incoming administration consult with Arab allies before starting any possible engagement with Syria or Iran. After the meeting, Rep. Ackerman made a statement to the press that emphasized U.S. support for the Tribunal and that U.S. relationship with Lebanon would not be an "appendage" to a relationship with any other country. End Summary.

2. (C) Codel Ackerman, accompanied by Ambassador and emboffs, met with majority leader Saad Hariri and his advisors December 13 in Beirut. Codel members were Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-NY, chairman of the subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the HFAC, and subcommittee members Rep. Jeff Flake, R-AZ; Joe Wilson, R-SC; Rep. Brian Higgins, D-NY; and Rep. Joe Klein, D-FL; as well as subcommittee staffers David Adams, Greg McCarthy, and Howard Diamond.

"SYRIA AND IRAN WANT NOT PEACE, BUT PIECES"

3. (C) Rep. Ackerman opened the meeting by delivering a strong message of support for Lebanon. He said it was key during this time of transition in the U.S. to reassure allies in Lebanon of continued bipartisan U.S. support. He affirmed that Lebanon was of "critical importance" to the United States and would not be treated as an "appendage" to a relationship with any other country. "Any relationship the United States hopes to expand with any other country in the region will not be at the expense of Lebanese blood," Ackerman said. Rep. Ackerman also stressed that Washington would not "desert" the Special Tribunal for Lebanon which is intended to hold accountable those responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and

related crimes.

¶4. (C) Hariri broached the topic of a possible U.S. dialogue with Syria and Iran. Hariri stressed that while nobody was against dialogue, it should begin with allies before foes. He suggested the new administration consult with moderate Arab regimes to understand their concerns and objectives before rushing into any engagement with Syria or Iran. He warned that engagement for the sake of engagement would be dangerous for the region. Hariri noted that the current U.S. administration had a dialogue with Syria for its first five years in office, until the assassination of his father, Rafik Hariri, and that this history had demonstrated that dialogue does not change Syria's behavior. "Syria and Iran do not want peace, they want pieces (of other countries, like Lebanon)," he said. Hariri welcomed Rep. Ackerman's steadfast support for the Special Tribunal. The blood of his father could "not be bargained away."

#### ISRAEL/PALESTINE AND LEBANESE ARMED FORCES

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¶5. (C) Hariri raised the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and urged the new administration to bring about a solution as a means of creating regional stability. Rep. Ackerman emphasized that the USG is a strong friend of Israel. He said he supported a two-state solution, and that if Israel is to survive as a democracy, it would have to do so in a peaceful region. Ackerman added that one way to help maintain peace in the region would be to build up and enhance the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which

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deserve the support of the international community. He said he was impressed with LAF Commander General Kahwagi, whom he met earlier in the day, and with the LAF's performance against Fatah-al-Islam militants in the Nahr Al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp in 2007.

¶6. (C) Hariri said he appreciated any support to enhance the capabilities of the LAF and commented that a strong military was important to the security of Lebanon. He said Lebanon's army was strong and dedicated, but very ill-equipped. He noted that the LAF had fought admirably in Nahr Al-Barid, but suffered a high casualty rate as it battled the heavily-armed militants.

#### 2009 ELECTIONS

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¶8. (C) When asked by Rep. Ackerman whether March 14 would win the 2009 parliamentary elections, Hariri answered that it would be "easy" as long as the coalition parties work together. If the political parties that form the March 14 coalition fight each other for parliamentary seats instead of fighting the opposition, March 14 will face trouble, he assessed. Hariri added that his Future Movement currently held 37 seats in parliament, but that he would be willing to give up some of those seats if it would help March 14 overall.

SISON